

wearing my flowing lavender hippie dress
and dangling purple shell-shaped earrings.
My hair will be naturally gray,
shoulder-length and wild,
the way I like it.

I will be bright-eyed and alert,
smiling broadly in spite of my worn-down
coffee-stained teeth
and my Map of Europe face.
Greenpeace, Save the Whale, Ban the Bomb,
and Vote Democrat buttons
will be pinned to my lapel
and I will be holding aloft
a copy of my best-selling,
Pulitzer-Prize-winning collection
of straight-forward, easy-to-understand poetry
that every literary critic in the free world
has proclaimed to be the turning point
in making poetry reading
as popular among the masses
as afternoon soaps
and MTV.

NATURAL SELECTION

It happens every Spring —
adult birds build their nests
in the branches of the giant juniper trees
outside my bedroom window.
The trees are heavy-branched and hanging —
unmoored to the house in any way.
They sway and thrash about
with every gust of wind.

From April to June we find
tiny nestlings scattered across the yard
like a field of soft brown dandelions —
shivering, not yet ready to fly,
stunned from their fall,
as the parent birds circle frantically above,
unable to help.

We used to carry them into the warmth
of the kitchen, wrap them in towels,
and force-feed them warm milk
with medicine droppers.
But they always died,
and the children would weep
and make graves for them
with markers of crossed sticks
and mounds of garden wildflowers.

Now the children are grown and gone.
Whenever I find the nestlings,
I place them gently in the apartment trash cans
so the neighborhood cats cannot torture them.
If they were to survive, they would build
their own nests in inappropriate places
and the cycle would continue.

I think of this when I watch the news
and see thousands upon thousands
of children dying from earthquakes,
floods, famines, drought, and disease,
because their parents could not find
a suitable place
to build their homes.

SOMETIMES BEING MANIC IS AN ASSET

All Julie wanted were some aspirin tablets
for her morning headache.
She asked at the nurses' station
and was told she could not have them
without her doctor's written consent.
"My doctor won't be in until tomorrow," said Julie.
"I'm SORRY!" snapped the nurse, annoyed at
being argued with. "Those are the RULES!"

"Are you telling me I can't have
TWO LOUSY ASPIRIN TABLETS?" shouted Julie,
beginning to shake and turn blue
at the corners of her mouth.
The nurse quickly backed away, holding up
her clipboard like a talisman.
"Don't yell at ME, young lady," she said
from the safer distance. "I don't make
the rules around here — I just work here!"

Julie spotted a small bottle of Bayer's
on the nurses' desk just inside the open window.
She grabbed it, shook out four tablets,
and replaced the bottle.
The nurse made no move to stop her
or to summon an attendant.
She liked her potted African violet
and the large color photo of her husband
too much to risk one of Julie's attacks.

Julie downed two of the aspirins
with a large swig of coffee
and put the other two in her jeans' pocket
for the next morning.
"I survived 100 capsules of 300-mg lithium,"